

**MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL** Obey leads Iraq delegation

By Craig Gilbert  
July 26, 2008

Washington - A day before Barack Obama visited Iraq, Wausau Democratic Rep. Dave Obey was there, leading a small delegation of federal lawmakers to Baghdad.

In an interview Friday, Obey said he went for two reasons: to see the massive new American Embassy in Iraq, and to check out concerns about possible health problems facing U.S. soldiers stationed in the region due to air quality and sandstorms.

Obey, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, was making his first trip to Iraq. He left the United States on July 17 and returned Monday.

"I was curious to just see what the living conditions and health conditions were of the troops," said Obey, who also went to Kuwait. "The sand and silica, all the dust in the air. I'm convinced our soldiers are going to be running into a whole lot of respiratory problems."

Obey did not directly criticize the embassy project, but said: "It's useful to alert people to concerns about whether or not this will lead to a much broader and much more visible presence than would be healthy over the long haul. The more visible we are, the more we are targets."

Obey, who has been a vocal critic of the war, also met in Baghdad with Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq.

In the interview Friday, Obey argued that recent developments on Iraq, including President Bush's acceptance of a "general time horizon" and the Iraqi government's public embrace of a 2010 timeline for U.S. troop withdrawal, bolstered the case that critics of the war

have made for withdrawal timetables.